



Morning Alert - Wednesday, November 2, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All broadcasters led with a report issued by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government on Tuesday saying that it has discovered that eight officials, including a vice governor, were responsible for changing the design of the Toyosu fish market. Top items in national papers included the Tokyo government's report on the Toyosu fish market and a press conference by Bank of Japan Governor Kuroda, in which he effectively acknowledged that his goal of achieving 2% inflation will not be met before he steps down in April 2018.

INTERNATIONAL

Abe holds talks with top Russian official

Most dailies reported that Prime Minister Abe on Tuesday met with visiting Russian Federation Council Speaker Matviyenko to discuss President Putin's upcoming trip to Japan in December, quoting Matviyenko as telling the press afterward: "Russo-Japanese relations are heading in a positive direction.

According to the papers, the parliamentary leader then held a news conference in which she said regarding the Northern Territories dispute: "Russia's position on the matter remains unchanged. No negotiations are being conducted on returning two or all of the four disputed islands because there are no legal grounds for returning them." On proposed Japanese economic support for the contested islands, Matviyenko underscored that Japanese firms will conduct operations based on Russian law.

Speaking on her planned trip to Nagasaki during her stay in Japan through Thursday, the Russian politician said the U.S. atomic bombing was a crime against humanity.

Economic ministers of Russia, Japan to hold talks on Japanese business investment

Several papers wrote that METI Minister Seko plans to visit Moscow tomorrow to attend a “High-level Consultation Committee” meeting regarding 50 economic projects for which the Putin administration is seeking Japanese assistance, including the construction of a natural gas pipeline between Sakhalin and Tokyo Bay. The Japanese minister is expected to hold talks with a number of Russian officials, including executives of major commercial enterprises. The Japanese side is hoping progress in economic cooperation will help resolve the bilateral territorial dispute.

Prospects for trilateral summit with China, ROK uncertain

Asahi reported that a proposed summit in December in Tokyo by Japan, China, and South Korea may not take place, as South Korean President Park is engulfed in a major political scandal and the Chinese have not responded to Japan’s offer to hold a leaders’ meeting on Dec. 3-4 in the Japanese capital perhaps in opposition to Japan’s position on the South China Sea dispute. Failing to convene the trilateral meeting this year could have “adverse effects on Japanese diplomacy next year,” in the words of an unnamed senior diplomat.

U.S., Japan, ROK to cooperate in imposing sanctions on Chinese firms

Nikkei claimed that the governments of Japan, the U.S., and South Korea are considering imposing sanctions on commercial enterprises of third countries that are supporting North Korea’s missile and nuclear development. Tokyo and Seoul plan to follow Washington’s lead in imposing financial sanctions on a Chinese trading firm with the goal of preventing the flow of capital into the DPRK. The daily added, however, that it is uncertain whether South Korea will be able to enforce strict sanctions on Chinese companies in view of the country’s strong economic ties with China. The paper also raised doubts about the effectiveness of trilateral financial sanctions.

China dismisses Japan’s protest against drilling activity in East China Sea

Most papers took up yesterday’s disclosure by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga that the GOJ has filed a protest with the Chinese government over new drilling activity in the East China Sea. According to Mainichi, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman dismissed the Japanese action, by saying: “[The drilling operation] is being carried out in undisputed waters under Chinese administration. We hope that Japan will refrain from taking issue with legitimate Chinese activities.”

POLITICS

TPP accord to be approved in current Diet session

Most papers reported on an agreement reached yesterday by the ruling LDP and the opposition Democratic Party to put the TPP legislation to a vote in the Lower House on Friday, noting that the bills will first be approved at a Lower House committee this afternoon and then passed at a plenary session two days later. As a result, the chances are high that parliamentary approval of the regional

free trade accord will be obtained during the current Diet session, which will probably be extended into early December. The dailies also said the two parties reached a consensus on enacting legislation to ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change on Friday.

In related stories, Mainichi and Nikkei wrote that there is still a wide gap between the ruling and opposition camps regarding the contents of the TPP accord even after intensive debate at the Diet for a month. The dailies claimed that the GOJ has failed to present solid ideas on how the nation's farmers can capitalize on the free trade deal to export more produce and ease consumer anxiety about food safety being compromised as a result of the TPP. The GOJ was also reportedly unable to rebut opposition legislators' claims on trade rules, such as the protection of intellectual property and investor-state dispute settlement provisions.

Diet debate on casino legislation to begin next week

Nikkei reported on the LDP's plan to start Diet deliberations on a bill designed to promote the development of "integrated resorts" on Nov. 9 at the earliest. The junior ruling partner Komeito, which is extremely cautious about legalizing gambling, has acknowledged the need to hold parliamentary discussions on allowing casinos in Japan. The daily projected, however, that it remains uncertain whether the legislation can be enacted in the current Diet session, as the bill will be debated at a committee chaired by a Democratic Party legislator.

SECURITY

U.S. refuses to allow Japanese authorities access to Sagami Depot

Tokyo Shimbun highlighted the final investigative report by the U.S. military regarding the fire that occurred in August 2015 at a warehouse at Sagami General Depot. Although the U.S. report failed to identify the exact cause of the accident, it claimed that a defect in a canister of compressed oxygen mostly likely ignited the fire. The U.S. military reportedly pledged to take appropriate measures to prevent a recurrence, including updating information on the supplies stored at all of the 71 warehouses at the installation. However, the daily stressed that the U.S. refused to allow the Japanese authorities to regularly access the depot for inspections. Kanagawa Governor Kuroiwa on Tuesday called for SOFA revision so that the Japanese side will have access in the event of a similar accident.

GOJ cautious about allowing SDF to go to the defense of foreign troops in South Sudan

Asahi highlighted yesterday's press remarks by Defense Minister Inada, who said it is implausible for SDF personnel in South Sudan to carry out so-called rush-to-the-rescue operations for foreign troops and that such a mission would be performed only to assist UN officials and civilian aid workers, including Japanese nationals. According to the daily, the Abe administration has put together draft guidelines for the operations for a briefing for ruling coalition lawmakers. In the

document, the administration emphasized that rush-to-the-rescue operations are temporary missions primarily meant to ensure the protection of Japanese NGO officials in the event that they come under attack and that sufficient training of SDF personnel for such operations will help improve their safety.

Universities to establish consortium on cyber-defense

Mainichi wrote that 13 prominent institutions of higher education, including Stanford, Cambridge, Oxford, and the University of Tokyo, will launch a joint taskforce to stem cyberterrorism by sharing relevant information and formulating effective countermeasures.

